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An analysis of environmental changes, resources and performance: an internal police organization perspective

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Abstract

This study examines from the employees' perspective the resources and performance of a police organization in the context of environmental changes. Using open structured interviews and near-data survey, data were collected from 40 police officers from a Romanian police force. Survey sheets were filled out by 26 participants. Results reveal that economic changes, mainly budget cuts for salaries, are the most frequently mentioned environmental change. Policemen most frequently mentioned physical resources as being used to perform their core activities. The lack of adequate organizational capabilities is positively associated with a low performance on the requirements set by the formal authority.

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1. Introduction

The way an organization functions is influenced by the environmental context in which it is embedded (Crank, 1990). This context includes various types of factors that shape the transformation of existing resources into performance outcomes (Wang & Ellinger, 2011). But a high organizational performance and a sustained competitive advantage derives from the resources and capabilities an organization controls, that are: valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and not substitutable (Barney, 1995). Capabilities are seen as the “*firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments*” (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997, p. 516). Due to environmental changes, for an organization, a resource what was, at one time, a source of sustained competitive advantage, might no longer be valuable (Barney, 1991). As stated by Barney (1991) “*a firm is said to*

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have a competitive advantage when it is implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors” (p. 102), while the sustained competitive advantage consists in the implementation of “a value creating strategy that is not simultaneously implemented by any current or potential competitors and when other firms are unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy” (p. 102). Because competitive and sustained competitive advantages are difficult to be measured, a series of studies have sought to link strategic resources and organizational performance (Cook, Ketchen, Combs, & Todd, 2008). Thus, conducting an internal analysis of these key resources and capabilities is more stringent in the case of the organizations that have a strategic role in serving the public better and making communities safer but do not have the self-funding status, such as police organizations. Since police forces, as most organizations, cannot easily change the environment in which they operate, environmental changes shape the levels of its resources that turn into performance outcomes. However, the extent to which the resources may translate into increased police performance is an empirical question that received little attention (Zhao, Zhang, & Thurman, 2010). Furthermore, it was highlighted the need to extend the research on police organization and their environments (Klinger, 2004). Thus, this study examines from the employees’ perspective the resources and performance of a Romanian police force in the context of environmental changes. First, the perceived political, economic, social, technological and legal changes that form the environmental context in which the police force meets its core activities are revealed. Based on Barney’s resource classification (1991) the types of resources used by this police force to accomplish its core activities will be identified. These resources will be analyzed in terms of their importance for the police core activities, scarceness and dependence on external stakeholders of the police force in relation to overall perceived performance.

The results of this study will extend the scarce literature on the topic of context, resources and performance in police organization. Practically, they will inform the key persons involved in the organizational change of the Romanian police forces about the political, economic, social, technological and legal factors as key drivers of organizational change. Also, they will be informed about employees’ perception of resources that can be used to face the environmental changes in order to facilitate a high organizational police performance that translates into better safety services provided to Romanian and foreign citizens. By analyzing how policemen perceive relations between resources and performance this study provides clues to what type of resources are seen as having the biggest impact on police performance and where should future resource allocations be directed to effectively perform.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants were 40 police officers from a Romanian police force that operates at national level. Their mean age was 36.58 (SD = 8.67) and most of them were males 87.5% (n = 35). The policemen were from all organizational hierarchical levels: top (n = 1), senior (n = 8), supervisory (n = 4) and operational (n = 27) from six main regions of the country. 26 participants filled in the survey sheets.

2.2. Instruments

A mixed-method approach that combined open structured interviews with near-data survey (Creswell, 2003) was used in this study. The data about the environmental changes and key resources that impact the core activities of this police force were collected through an open structured interview designed for a broader research on the environmental and internal analysis of the European police forces within a 7th FP project on security issue. Near-data survey sheets were used to evaluate the mentioned resources in terms

of their importance for the core activities of the police force, scarceness and level of dependence on external stakeholders of this police force. Each aspect was evaluated using one item on a 7-point Likert-scale arranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

The overall organizational police performance was evaluated with four items on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*). Each item measured one aspect of this performance: performance on the requirements set by the formal authority and its internal priorities, alignment of its internal priorities with the requirements set by the formal authority and the expectations of its external stakeholders.

2.3. Procedure

The interview was individually conducted with each participant. The near data survey sheets were filled in during the interview. The interviewees' answers about the main environmental changes were coded using PESTL framework (political, economic, social, technological and legal change; Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2008) while those regarding resources were coded using Barney's resource classification (1991) (financial, human, organizational, physical resources, capabilities). The coding activity was independently done by two researchers (inter-rater agreement -100%). The interviews were conducted at the interviewees' police units during working time and had a mean length of 1h30.

3. Results and discussion

During the interviews the policemen mentioned frequently about economic ($v = 23$, 37.7%), mainly budget cuts for salaries, and legal changes ($v = 20$, 29.5%). Also, other types of changes were mentioned, such as technological ($v = 9$, 14.8%), political ($v = 9$, 14.8%) and social changes ($v = 2$, 3.3%). There were significant differences between the frequencies of all these types of environmental changes ($\chi^2(4) = 22.52$, $p < .001$). Similar to other public institutions, this police force firstly considers the economic and legal changes as having an impact on its core activities (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2008).

The main types of resources are presented in Table 1. It was found that policemen provided significantly different types of resources $\chi^2(4) = 159.23$, $p < .001$.

Table 1. Main types of resources mentioned by the police officers as having an impact on their core activities

Resources	v(%)	Importance (m)	Scarceness (m)	Dependence on external parties (m)
Financial	6(3.2%)	6.42	3.75	6.17
Human resources	54 (28.72%)	6.39	5.12	4.69
Organizational resources	10 (5.32%)	6.78	5.50	5.22
Capabilities	20 (10.64%)	6.41	5.01	4.60
Physical resources	98(52.13%)	6.36	3.85	4.87

The results reveal that physical resources are most used by the police force to meet its core activities (52.13%), including infrastructure ($v = 20$, 10.64%), special technical equipment ($v = 31$, 16.49%), informatics ($v = 14$, 7.45%), armament ($v = 2$, 1.06%), vehicles ($v = 5$, 2.66%) and road equipment ($v = 7$, 3.72%), communication technologies ($v = 6$, 3.19%), office and car consumables (6.91%).

The human resources are mentioned on the second place by the interviewees (28.72%). The most frequently discussed human resource is the number of the employees of this police force ($v = 13$, 6.91%). It was found that this police force must meet its core activities with a reduced number of the personnel but

who is well trained ($v = 9$, 4.79%), highly experienced ($v = 7$, 3.72%), professional ($v = 3$, 1.6%), poses a good work task-related general knowledge and is work engaged ($v = 2$, 1.06%). The reduction in personnel is a consequence of blocking all new hiring in the public sector to combat the national economic recession: “... *there were few hires in the last two years because of the budget austerity*”. Other human resources mentioned only once were morality, duty feelings, knowledge of technical use, motivation, education, ability to work with people, organizing and planning activities, colleagues’ and chiefs’ thinking, solidarity, integrity, competence, seriousness, diverse experience. Also, some interviewees mentioned once about candidates to school and educational police institutions and partners represented by other national and international police units.

Other types of resources used by this police force are those represented by the capabilities (10.64%) and organizational resources (5.32%). The most frequently mentioned organizational resource is the leadership within this police force ($v = 2$, 1.06%). Other organizational resources mentioned once by the police officers were trust, knowing subordinates, organizational climate, history and morality of the institution, interpersonal relations, and the presence of foreign representatives. In terms of capabilities, the participants discussed most about human resources management ($v = 4$, 2.13%), general communication ($v = 2$, 1.06%) and external communication ($v = 5$, 2.66%). Other capabilities mentioned once include information and resource management, internal cooperation, organization management, external collaboration, collaboration and existence of the procedures.

The financial resources were the least mentioned by the police officers as being used to meet their core activities (3.2%) and included money they need to accomplish these activities ($v = 3$, 1.6%), to maintain the infrastructure and technical supply and to pay employees’ wages and their monthly rents for accommodation.

Table 1 indicates that policemen strongly agreed that organizational resources are important for their core activities, while they agree upon others types of resources. They neither agreed or disagreed that they have enough financial and physical resources. In terms of financial resources scarceness, one participant mentioned: “*If it is comes to speak about these financial resources, it is a disaster, but a disaster to a national level, not only at us...*”, illustrating their financial dependence on the public budget. The participants only slightly agreed that they have enough capabilities, human and organizational resources. Also, financial resources are considered as being dependent on the external parties of this police force. In terms of other types of resources, the participants slightly agreed that they are dependent on the external parties. The results reveal that policemen perceive the lack of adequate organizational capabilities as being directly associated with a low performance on the requirements set by the formal authority ($\rho = .59$, $p < .05$). The importance, scarceness and dependence on external parties of other types of resources used by this police force were not significantly associated with the aspects of overall organizational police performance. These results partially overlap those existing in the literature that identified a positive small relationship between the strategic resources and performance (Crank, 2003; Crook, Ketchen, Combs, & Todd, 2008; Zhao, Zhang, & Thurman, 2010).

The mixed method approach used in the present study led to some conflicting results. On one hand, the quantitative approach leads to the conclusion that there is no significant association between the resources used by the policemen and the overall organizational perceived police performance as shown by the high number of non-significant and low value correlation coefficients. On the other hand, considered the answers at the open ended questions, most of the time policemen mention the lack of different types of resources as being the cause for drop in performance. This could be explained by the overly positive self-evaluation done by the participants. To verify this, it would be useful to see what are the perception external stakeholders and of those who are the beneficiaries of their activities (e.g. general citizens) on police performance. Another possible explanation for the lack of correlation between perceived resource aspects and overall organizational perceived performance comes from finding out how do policemen cope

with the lack of resources, such as informal contacts. The questions raised by this approach are: how long can this be a solution to the lack of appropriate resources and will it affect police performance on long term? The small number of participants in our study limits the degree of generalization of our conclusions, but it opens up the venue for future research. This research should be look into how the relation between resources and performance is seen by different external parties of the police force. Furthermore, this study was not focused on investigating the process through which environmental changes influence the level of resources and strategic resources yield performance gains (Crook, Ketchen, Combs, & Todd, 2008). This research question can be examined by integrating also the contextual element and the issue of multilevel research that will permit the analysis of the same phenomena at multiples level, including individual police officer and team, unit, county inspectorate, police force and even country level.

4. Conclusions

Organizational capabilities from the police force as perceived by the policemen can be considered a driver of organizational performance in the dynamic context in which it operates, mainly in terms of their scarceness. These results extend the literature on resources and performance of police organizations in the context of environmental changes. Future studies should examine the dynamic relationship between resources and performance and to what extent policemen perception of it fits reality.

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